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ABSTRACT

Project Career (New Berlin, Wisconsin) is a special vocational needs education support program for disabled adolescents. The project's underlying philosophy focuses on early detection of potential vocational limitations steming from handicaps and the development of skills to overcome, compensate for, or contend with the disability. Eligibility criteria includes demonstrated need and acceptance of the project's philosophy by the student, parents and school. Among the services offered through Project Career are inschool work evaluation and training, inschool work adjustment, and job experience opportunities. Courses are offered in the following areas: awareness, assertiveness, and job attitudes; exploring, discovering, and investigating jobs; planning and preparing for the future; and finding, getting, and keeping a job. Results of an informal survey of project participants show that 80% of the students are employed. Among problems facing the project are student failure in academic subjects, arrangements regarding staff and student schedules between schools and school districts, and provision of transportation in a suburban area. (SB)

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PROJECT CAREER

Special Vocational Needs Education Support Program

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New Berlin Public Schools has developed a unique special or exceptional education program, a special vocational needs education support program -- Project Career. To fully appreciate Project Career and its unique features one must know not only what Project Career is, but why Project Career exists. To become aware of Project Career and its inner workings six areas will be addressed. These six areas will include:

- the Project's underlying philosophy;
- a brief discussion on the population served and the Project's eligibility criteria;
- the Project's goals and some key objectives;
- the physical plant, equipment and even some materials will be highlighted;
- findings from the Project's first informal evaluation; and
- unique features of the Project including some barriers and future program recommendations.

Why Project Career exists, why it exists in New Berlin Public Schools, why it was designed for high incidence youth and young adults is the essence of Project Career. To know why Project Career you need the answers to these questions.

Prior to the development of Project Career, New Berlin Public Schools recognized that many handicapped and disabled youth who were not succeeding in the competitive world of work could "if" given the opportunity and necessary support. Concerned staff knew learning and emotionally disabled youth who often spent many of their young productive years at home rather than on-the-job or in another productive environment could be helped. Individuals with handi-

caps could become productive members of society, but more importantly productive, contributing members within their own community. In developing this program staff felt that as the youth and young adults in the program began to develop positive, productive work related skills, their levels of dignity and self worth would increase dramatically. Moreover, staff knew that the skills would transfer to the job site if the student-employees had the staff and the employers support their efforts.

Why Project Career? Project Career because for many handicapped and disabled youth and young adults the public school program will be the last training or education program they will ever be a part of. Educationally, emotionally and other disabled youth who are mild or moderately handicapped but high risk occupationally have little occupatonal training opportunities following the formal public school experience. Because the public school experience is often the last opportunity many youth will have to develop career, vocational and occupational skills it is critical that school experience be occupationally enriching for the handicapped student.

Project Career or a special vocational needs education support program should be in the public school because the public school, the community's school is providing youth with skills they can carry into their community. The public school is the best choice for such a vocational or occupational program because the school has the physical plant, the trained personnel -- both regular educators and special educators, and it is the most productive and least restrictive alternative for many mild and moderately handicapped youngsters. Moreover, the school, the public school experience provides the handicapped or disabled individual the opportunity for early intervention in occupational preparation. It is this, the opportunity to intervene before devastating employment experiences occur that is the essence

of the special vocational needs education support program -- Project Career.

Underlying Project Career is the philosophy and concept of early intervention. This project focuses on early intervention or more specifically early detection of potential vocational or occupational limitations stemming from specific and indentifable handicaps. Following the identification of the potential disability area the development of skills to overcome, compensate for or contend with the disability are emphasized. While this concept stems from the medical model New Berlin tested it experimentally with a group of high risk adolescent learning disabled boys in 1976.

In the school's pilot project it was learned that many of the learning disabled youth who left the school without career and vocational preparation often remained home. Many began to stay home following a number of failings on the job. When staff began to analyze some of the problems the youth were having they seemed to stem back to some of the same perceptual, motor, language and behavior problems they had throughout their school careers. In fact, many of the problems were language based. During the pilot, however, it was learned that many of the youth enrolled had little career awareness, had little knowledge of employer expectations nor had they ever had the necessary exposure to employer-employee interrelationship skills. Moreover, the pilot clearly indicated that while many handicapped youngsters needed career and vocational exploration and training less than one percent were receiving that training either in the special education programs or in the mainstreamed classes.

The pilot project, however, demonstrated that youth with severe learning disabilities and behavior problems who were exposed to careers, career opportunities and requirements, occupational training and support for that training, and support on the job could and did enter and remain in the

competitive world of work. For some of the youth they learned that they could never realistically meet the entry requirements for specific careers, given the time frames they had established for themselves. Others learned by exploring the careers first hand that their expectation and the employers expectations were often far afield. Still others needed adaptations in training in order to reach their goals. Some adaptations were behavioral in nature and required staff on site to instruct the student worker in appropriate manners and behavior. The pilot demonstrated the need for a special vocational needs education support program for severely involved learning and emotionally disabled youth. Moreover, it demonstrated that if early intervention was employed in the program occupational success rates would increase significantly and fewer handicapped high potential drop-outs would leave the public school program.

Using the findings of the pilot project combined with a more recent student, school and community needs assessment Project Career was initiated. Supported with P.O. 94-142 funds, a personal philosophy and the desire to succeed, Project Career began two years ago. As the project began it had many goals and objectives to meet, but the primary goal was to identify the specific population it was to serve.

While the pilot project focused primarily on learning disabled adolescents, the needs assessment indicated a much broader need. The needs assessment indicated that students in high incidents programs wanted and required these services. The assessment also indicated that the program aspect of occupational training be started early enough in the child's school career so the child would not turn off and drop-out before training was completed. In an attempt to meet the needs identified in the school and community a committee adopted the following eligibility criteria.

First, the individual referred for the special vocational needs education support program had to be receiving special education services at least in one area for no less than five hours per week.

Second, unless waived by the Director of Special Education students must be at least sixteen years of age.

Third, the student must demonstrate the need to be in Project Career (i.e., the student must have an occupational limitation).

Fourth, the student must want to be involved in the program.

Fifth, the student, parents and school must accept the philosophy and direction of occupational preparation rather than academic development.

With this definition the project is presently serving learning disabled, emotionally disabled educable retarded youth, Tourettes victims, visually impaired, and stroke victims. Additionally, services are being provided severely involved physically handicapped students on an experimental basis. Also, youth in day treatment programs through the school district are being served. Direct services are provided to sixteen individuals on a daily basis, four on a weekly basis, five on a monthly schedule, and two as needed.

Evident in the population served, the eligibility criteria allows for multi-categorical or non-categorical placement. Moreover, the criteria were written so to include the input of the entire multi-disciplinary team in recommending these services. To date, little difficulty has been

encountered in the use of this definition. However, with shifts in various populations throughout the district's special education programs as well as dropping enrollments and outside agency program options, this definition may have to be modified.

The eligibility criteria was established to determine who, in high incidence programs required occupational intervention services. These services include: in-school work evaluation and training; in-school work adjustment; and job experience opportunities. The overriding goal of these program options was the development of the skills necessary to locate, get and keep a job. Each program option has its own unique objective. The in-school work evaluation's objective is that...

> The student will be able to verbalize or demonstrate in some acceptable manner his or her occupational or career choice and the method(s) to be used to reach that goal.

The in-school work adjustment option has a program objective and a student objective. The program objective is that...

> The program will provide the student with an environment that develops and reinforces appropriate job skills so to develop within the individual both the psychological and physical stamina for the job.

The student objective for the in-school work adjustment program is that...

> The student will demonstrate appropriate job behaviors at the beginning, during and following the completion of the assigned task.

The job experience program is an alternative to the school's work experience

program. Job experience, however, was not designed to supplant the other program. Job experience, was designed to develop within the student the skills necessary to work productively in a non-sheltered work site. Another goal of this program is to develop job skills to such a point where a Project Career participant could transfer from job experience to the regular work experience program.

Project Career provides exceptional youth and young adults with more than vocational or occupational skill training options. Youth enrolled in any exceptional education program offered by the school district can participate in another Project Career program option -- the career education classes. Herein youth have the opportunity to learn about various careers while at the same time earn credit toward graduation. Secondary students may enroll in one or all of the course offerings. The courses offered include:

- Awareness, assertiveness and job attitudes...
  This course was designed to help the adolescent learn more about himself and others, learn about the world of work, learn how to positively deal with change and stress, and learn how attitudes play a significant role in one's life and job.
- Exploring, discovering and investigating jobs...
  The second course in the series stresses jobs in each of thirteen career clusters.
- Planning and Preparing for the future...
  uses a variety of media so students can be guided through a series of activities emphazing the skills required to focus on a career choice, to

seek employment and to obtain and maintain competitive employment.

The last course in the series offered through the project is:

- Essentials: How to find, get and keep a job... This course deals in a no non-sense manner with skills the job seeker needs in order to locate, get and keep employment in the now highly competitive and often changing world of work.

Since these courses have been offered to exceptional students enrolled in grades eleven and twelve, seventy-two students have enrolled in three semesters. Expanding this option downward to younger students it is expected that a slight increase in enrollment will occur in these classes.

At present, the Project takes up little more than one-half of a regular size classroom or four-hundred fifty square feet. This need is for the work evaluation center, office, work adjustment, testing and materials resource. Classrooms in two schools are used for the career education classes. While regular classrooms will still be used in future years, the center's space will be reduced to two-hundred forty square feet during the next school year. While space is being reduced, students will continue to be served and the numbers served will increase. Although this was a planned move, in an effort to remain in a supportive role, Project personnel are not sure of its effect on students.

Moving to smaller quarters while retaining the same amount of equipment poses a number of unique logistical problems, but none insurmountable. Equipment necessary for the Project's evaluation and adjustment options include work benches, study carrels, tools, work samples, cabinets and a variety of supplies to maintain the center.

In addition to equipment, the materials employed both for the career education classes and resources for staff and school personnel are numerous. McKnight's materials abound in the resource center as well as Singer's Survival Kit and Career Awareness Program. Games and reference book for staff and students are readily at hand. Computer programs designed for career awareness, interest and occupational readiness are also available. Tests of almost every design are available to youth. New Mexico's Career Education Series is on site as is the World of Work Battery. Reading laden as well as reading free tests are available an used frequently. Materials available are as varied as the students using them.

As indicated earlier, this Project is the result of both a pilot project in 1976 and a needs assessment in 1979. The results of the pilot were highly successful. That is the youth who participated, successfully completed the training program. Those youth, for the most part, have been successful in the competitive job market. In a recent informal survey, 80 percent of the students were employed. Fifty percent employed in jobs related to their field of training during the pilot. Only three or twenty percent continued training following their high school pilot program and only one of the three completed the training sequence begun. Overall, the results of the pilot were quite positive.

At the end of the third semester of the present project little data was available. Of that available the following pertains to graduates. Ten individuals left the program following one semester of contact through the project. Three had less than ten hours of contact time per week with the project during their enrollment. Of those three, all have dropped out of school prior to graduation. One, her whereabouts

is unknown. The other two are temporarily employed part-time. Seven individuals were seen directly for ten or more hours per week. One is in long term sheltered work. Four are competitively employed in the community. Two are performing adequately in the military -- one in the Marines and one in the U.S. Army.

By the end of the present school year, it is anticipated that four individuals will leave the schools being served. Two individuals will be competitively employed within the community. One in light factory the other in housekeeping. One will enter sheltered work for at least one year. If the last individual is not hospitalized, sheltered work is anticipated for at least six months to a year.

Given a similar population next year it is anticipated that three individuals will complete their high school experience. One is slated for on-the-job training as a geriatric care worker; one light factory; and one in security work. All individuals in this set are being seen for more than ten hours per week. They are also in a primary special education program for at least another five hours. These cursory results indicate that a strong relationship exists between the amount of time in the program and the individual's success or measured success in the community's competitive job market. This success factor also relates to the unique nature of the program.

Initially this project was referred to as a unique special or exceptional education program. Throughout, one can detect some of the program's unique features. The most unique aspect of the program, however, is that it exists and it exists in the public school. Moreover, it is supported by students, staff, and the community. This program is unique because it attempts to provide handicapped and disabled youngsters with an individualized vocational and occupational program leading to appropriate

employment, hopefully, competitive employment within the community. Being unique and moderately successful does not by any means mean that this Project is without problems.

A major problem facing the project and potential referrals is the academic merry-go-round. Regardless of how long mild and moderately handicapped students fail in the academic arena teachers, special education teachers, continue to emphasize these skills. Academics for many of these youth are stressed until the student leaves the school either unprepared or ill-prepared for the world of work. Moreover, they leave the school at an academic disadvantage despite intensive academic intervention. As Irvine, Goodmen and Mann noted in their book Teaching the Learning Disabled Adolescent, we must recognize that the academic time clock is running out and place an emphasis on vocational rather than academic training. This may be the most significant problem area of the program, however, a constant thorn of the program lies in scheduling.

Working between schools and sometimes between school districts it becomes very difficult to arrange staff as well as student schedules. Inter-agency scheduling becomes a nightmare if more than one student is being seen outside of the district on a long or short term basis. The greatest of all nightmares is when the student is being seen in-school by regular education, special education, the Project and outside by an agency representative and enrolled in a training program. Like all school programs, however, the Project must learn to be more than flexible. Aiding in this dilema is the administrative staff.

The administrative staff of the high schools is where the Project found the most support following a great deal of difficulty. Initially, too many students were identified, too many changes occurred, too many personnel were effected and too little communication had occurred between

Project staff and administrative personnel. Principals, vice-principals, counselors and significant others were not in-serviced appropriately prior to the onset of the Project. While in-servicing occurred it did not meet the needs of the various people. Moreover, the in-service addressed what the program was about and why, rather than how it would affect the individuals and the staff. Once immediate lines of communication were opened to all personnel the program began to develop more smoothly. Moreover, the administration listened attentively to the scheduling difficulties, but try as they did, had no control over its effects on a separate project.

Serving two schools simultaneously presents a variety of problems, even within the same district. Philosophical differences occur between buildings and among staff. At times these differences interfere with programming efforts geared for the best interests of students. This is a difficult problem, a problem that will take a great deal of time to accommodate and, if possible, modify, but never eliminate.

Being in a suburban almost rural area with no transportation poses a major problem for most students capable of competitive employment, but unable to provide personal transportation. Project funds are sometimes used to transport students to job sites within the district. Vocational Rehabilitation funds, when available, are sought to off-set this cost of special transportation. Many times, the best alternative has been student carpooling. However, like school schedules, carpooling schedules become difficult to maintain.

While the Project has had and will continue to uncover barriers, many positive features and events have occurred. In working with the computer, an Apple 48k, computer science students have begun to develop programs in the area of math and language. Industrial Arts and Vocational Education students have begun to design adaptive devices for the physically

handicapped. These devices allow those students to use the computer, radios, television games, turn on and off lights and so on. Some teachers have provided a number of job leads for students. Being in the second year of the program one can be very pleased with the program's accomplishments and the acceptance it has received from district staff.

Several events should take place in the third year of the Project. First, the curriculum developed in the career education and work adjustment phases should be refined and made available to district staff. While approximately twenty percent of the district's special needs students are being served by Project Career, eighty percent are receiving little support or direction in career and vocational areas. Thus, the services of the project should be expanded so to increase in-school career and vocational opportunities to the eight percent of the students not presently being served. Finally, residential and industrial communities within the city should be made fully aware of the Project, its purpose and successes, and solicit additional support for more community based job sites, both paid and unpaid.

If these events occur and occur successfully, youth being served through the Project will fair favorably. Moreover, these youth will have a greater chance in succeeding in the community's competitive job market.

Before closing I want to share with you an audio visual presentation depicting the program and some of its services. Following this presentation I will be available for questions.

Handicapped students academic time clocks are running out. To insure their success in the world of work. Programs like Project Career must support their life-centered occupational efforts.